

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) In a method for sterilizing an article in a sterilizing chamber by exposing the article to humidified ozone containing gas in at least a pair of first and second consecutive sterilizing cycles, the improvement comprising, after the first sterilizing cycle and prior to the second sterilizing cycle, removing from the sterilizing chamber any condensed water present by effecting a step of flushing the chamber with an ~~inert~~ a gas that does not form oxygenated products by contact with ozone.
2. (cancelled)
3. (currently amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the ~~inert~~ gas is oxygen.
4. (original) A method according to claim 3, wherein the flushing step is repeated at least once.
5. (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the temperature in the chamber is stabilized before the start of the second sterilizing cycle.
6. (currently amended) In a method for the sterilization of an article comprising at least two consecutive sterilization cycles, wherein the first of said consecutive cycles comprises the steps of:
 - (a) providing a sterilization chamber;
 - (b) placing the article into the sterilization chamber;
 - (c) sealing the sterilization chamber;
 - (d) maintaining the sterilization chamber operating temperature at about 20-35°C;

(e) applying a vacuum of a preselected vacuum pressure to the sterilization chamber, the vacuum pressure being adjusted to a level sufficient to lower the boiling point of water to a temperature at least as low as the temperature in the sterilization chamber;

(f) humidifying the sterilization chamber by exposing an amount of water to the vacuum pressure in the sterilization chamber for boiling the water, the amount of water being selected so that the water vapour produced is sufficient to achieve a relative humidity of 90-100% in the sterilization chamber;

(g) supplying ozone-containing gas to the sterilization chamber;

(h) maintaining the sterilization chamber sealed for a preselected treatment period;
and

(i) releasing the vacuum in the sterilization chamber;

and the second of said at least two consecutive sterilization cycles comprising repeating at least steps (e) to (h) the improvement comprising:

effecting an additional step between said first and second cycle wherein the additional step comprises (j) removing any condensed water from the sterilization chamber by effecting a step of flushing the chamber with ~~an inert~~ a gas that does not form oxygenated products by contact with ozone.

7. (original) A method of claim 6, wherein the sterilization chamber is maintained at an operating temperature of about 30°C.

8. (previously presented) A method of claim 7, wherein the vacuum pressure is between 0.1 and 10 mbar.

9. (original) A method of claim 8, wherein the vacuum pressure is between 0.5 and 2 mbar.

10. (previously presented) A method of claim 6, wherein the steps (e) to (g) are repeated a number of times sufficient to ensure complete sterilization of the article and wherein step (j) is repeated after each sterilization cycle except the last cycle.

11. (cancelled)

12. (currently amended) A method according to claim 6, wherein the ~~inert~~ gas is oxygen.

13. (original) A method according to claim 12, wherein the flushing step is repeated at least once.

14. (previously presented) A method according to claim 6, wherein the temperature of the chamber is stabilized before the start of said second sterilizing cycle.

15. (new) A method according to claim 6 wherein the step of removing from the sterilizing chamber any condensed water present further comprises applying a vacuum to the sterilization chamber before flushing the chamber with the gas that does not form oxygenated products by contact with ozone.

16. (new) A method according to claim 1 wherein the step of removing from the sterilizing chamber any condensed water present further comprises applying a vacuum to the sterilization chamber before flushing the chamber with the gas that does not form oxygenated products by contact with ozone.

17. (new) In a method for sterilizing an article in a sterilizing chamber by exposing the article to humidified ozone containing gas in at least a pair of first and second consecutive sterilizing cycles, the improvement comprising, after the first sterilizing cycle and prior to the second sterilizing cycle, removing from the sterilizing chamber any condensed water present by, in the substantial absence of any sterilant, effecting a step of applying a vacuum to the sterilization chamber and then flushing the chamber with a gas that does not form oxygenated products by contact with ozone.

18. (new) A method according to claim 17, wherein the flushing step is repeated at least once.